

MEMORIAL AND REPORT (re New England Asylum for the Blind)

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House Document No. 22, 1833.

HV1796 M

Z

HV1796 M
N
cop 1

HOUSE No. 22.

MEMORIAL.

*To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives in General
Court Assembled.*

The undersigned, a Committee in behalf of the Trustees of the New England Asylum for the Blind, respectfully represent, that after considerable delays and expense, they have at length brought that Institution to a state of forwardness, which is not only sufficient to demonstrate that the Blind are capable of being made to contribute in a considerable degree to their own support, but are susceptible of great progress in intellectual and moral improvement. In order to arrive at this point the Trustees first despatched a gentleman of high reputation to Europe, where he remained several months, and in the course of that time, visited most of the Institutions on the Continent of Europe, as well as in England, for the Instruction of the Blind. On his return to this city, he brought with him two blind Teachers, one of them a native of France, as an instructor in the Mathematics and higher branches of literature and science; the other from Scotland as a Teacher in several mechanic arts.

Immediately on the return of their Agent, the Trustees decided after mature deliberation, to select half a dozen children from among the numerous blind in the State, and make an experiment in educating them.

In the month of August last, the Institution was opened in this city, with six young persons, most of whom were supported at the expense of the Institution, being unable to contribute anything towards their own education.

The Trustees are now desirous that the Legislature, by whose bounty they have been enabled to prosecute their design thus far, should witness the success of the experiment. The mission of an Agent to Europe; the purchase of the necessary apparatus for teaching; the Salaries of Teachers, and the support of the pupils thus far, has so nearly exhausted the slender resources in the hands of the Trustees, that without further aid it will be impossible to continue the establishment even in its present humble condition, much less to extend its usefulness so as to embrace any considerable proportion of the unhappy class of beings for whose benefit it is intended.

The undersigned respectfully request that the Legislature will permit the Trustees to lay before them the result of their exertions, confidently relying on the good feeling and intelligence of the community to extend to them that aid which they are convinced may be justly claimed for the indigent Blind of the Commonwealth.

EDWARD BROOKS,	}	<i>Committee of the Trustees.</i>
HORACE MANN,		
S. C. PHILLIPS		

Boston, January 15, 1833.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 15, 1833.

Referred to Messrs. MCKAY, of Pittsfield, FOSTER, of Worcester,
and OLIVER, of Boston, with such as the Senate may join.

Sent up for concurrence.

ATTEST.

L. S. CUSHING, *Clerk.*

IN SENATE, January 15, 1833.

Read and referred to Messrs. LOUD, and MOTLEY, in concurrence.

CHARLES CALHOUN, *Clerk.*

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Representatives to whom was referred the petition in behalf of the New England Asylum for the Blind, having fully considered that subject, ask leave to

REPORT:

That the Trustees of the said New England Asylum, after the organization of that Institution in the year 1829, pursuant to their Act of Incorporation, finding themselves entirely destitute of funds wherewith to accomplish the objects of their association, applied to certain individuals in this city, from whose liberality they realized about the sum of \$2000. In the year 1830, they applied to the Legislature for aid, and by a Resolve of that year the unexpended balance of the annual appropriation for the Institution of the Deaf and Dumb at Hartford, was placed at their disposal. From this source the Trustees have realized on an average upon the three years during which they have received it, the sum of about \$1400 a year. These have been the only funds in the possession of the Institution; and it is with these means alone that the Trustees have defrayed all the expenses of the measures hereafter spoken of, and have placed the Institution in its present encouraging condition.

This unexpended balance now constitutes the whole resources of the Institution; and aside from the smallness of the sum, it will be at once perceived that it is liable to be altogether withdrawn to meet the priority of claim, which the Deaf and Dumb may have upon it.

At the time of this grant there was not an Institution for the education of the Blind on this side of the Atlantic; and the Trustees, being fully convinced, that the most effectual mode of subserving the permanent interests of the Asylum, would be to avail themselves of the experience of other Institutions established for a similar purpose, deemed it advisable to despatch a special messenger to the Continent of Europe and the Island of Great Britain, where schools for the instruction of the Blind had, for many years, been in successful operation. They accordingly engaged the services of Dr. Samuel G. Howe, who embarked for Europe in September 1831, and having thoroughly

examined the principal Institutions upon the other side of the Atlantic, he returned to this country in July 1832. At Paris, he engaged the services of Mr. Treuchet, a blind gentleman, who had been a teacher of Mathematics at the Royal Institution in that city. Dr. Howe also engaged a blind mechanic from the Institution at Edinburgh, who is capable of teaching his blind brethren to manufacture a great variety of articles, requiring mechanical skill and ingenuity, and for the fabrication of which an apprenticeship is necessary even for those who are blessed with the organs of sight.

The Trustees have uniformly expressed, in the strongest terms, their entire satisfaction with the manner in which Dr. Howe had executed the object of his mission. He seems to have made himself master of the general processes of educating the Blind at foreign Institutions, not merely for the sake of transferring those processes here; but rather as furnishing useful hints for further improvements.

Your Committee are further informed, that the Trustees, anxious to demonstrate *the feasibility of educating the Blind*, resolved to devote all their means to one satisfactory experiment; fully believing, that, if their efforts were crowned with success, an enlightened and christian community would come forward to aid them in their cause; while, on the other hand, should they fail, the object of the Institution might be abandoned without further expenditure.

Accordingly, having given notice of their intentions, they took the first six blind youth who offered themselves; and as they were all paupers, the Trustees were obliged to board and lodge, as well as educate them at the expense of the Institution.

These individuals were not selected with reference to their mental or physical capacities. They were of different ages, varying from six to twenty years. They were from the interior, and two of them were accidentally met by Dr. Howe, in the high road, while going in search of another. They were sisters, daughters of a mother who has had four blind children, three of whom are now living.

The education of these children commenced at the Asylum about the first of September, 1832, and your Committee, on visiting the Institution were delighted and astonished at the progress which they had made in the short space of five months.

One little girl, only six years of age, related such chapters and verses in the New Testament as were named to her, and read them with perfect distinctness of articulation and correctness of pronunciation; the letters being raised from the surface of the page, by a peculiar mode of printing, so that she could feel the shape of them with her fingers. These passages were taken at random, and were named to her by some member of the Committee.

Another girl of eight years of age could read more rapidly. She read passages of Scripture taken promiscuously, and also from a volume, consisting of extracts from various English authors.

She answered with perfect correctness many questions in geography, and seemed to have a clear idea of the nature and object of that study. Upon the map she would readily indicate different countries, give the boundaries, their latitude and longitude, put her fingers upon any capital town, whose name was mentioned to her, and, indeed, would answer any questions proposed to her, appertaining to that subject, with as much readiness and accuracy, as children of her age usually exhibit.

Most of the pupils had made such progress in arithmetic as to be able to solve questions in the four fundamental rules. Their sums are wrought by fixing types in a board, filled with holes, so that they discover the value of the figures by the relative position of the types, and can add, subtract, multiply, or divide, with facility. In mathematical studies at least, the Blind seem capable of making quite as much proficiency as seeing persons.

Besides the studies already mentioned, considerable attention appears to have been given to music, the pupils being able to sing, and to play on different musical instruments with some skill and taste; and your Committee cannot doubt that most of them may be qualified to become organists in churches and teachers of music.

Finally, as the result of a careful investigation, your Committee would express their firm conviction of the practicability of imparting to the blind the benefits of a mechanical, intellectual and moral education, by means of an Institution, like the one whose petition has been referred to their consideration, provided they are furnished with the necessary apparatus, and supplied with the pecuniary means of obtaining competent instructors. It becomes then, in their opinion, the imperative duty of the Legislature, acting in their paternal character, to ameliorate the condition of this unfortunate and hitherto neglected class of the community.

The State of Massachusetts has ever distinguished herself by her efforts to place within the reach of all her children the means of education; acting upon the only sound and reciprocal principle, that if the duties of a good citizen are to be required of the man, a good education should be first given to the child. Not less than half a million is raised in this Commonwealth annually, by taxation, for the education of her youth. In this bountiful appropriation neither the Blind nor the Deaf and Dumb can at all participate. The latter class, however, have been most liberally provided for. There is, at the present time, a standing appropriation of \$6,500, to be expended out of the State for the purpose of their education. They have been thus provided with the means of supplying, in some degree, the deprivation of their senses. It is now ascertained that there is another class of our fellow beings, equally unfortunate, and it is believed equally numerous, who are as capable of being taught, and who have still stronger claims

upon the humane regards of the Commonwealth. Your Committee repeat, that in their opinion the claims of the Blind are stronger than those of the Deaf and Dumb, because the latter can learn a trade with more facility, and obtain a livelihood without any peculiar method of instruction, or any Institution established for that express purpose; while the Blind, if abandoned to their fate, must inevitably become a burden to their friends or to the community.

Your Committee would not be understood to question for a moment the propriety of all former appropriations for the education of the Deaf and Dumb. On the contrary, they would refer to the liberal allowances made in their behalf, as among the beneficent acts, which every generous friend must strive to imitate, and which even her enemies cannot but applaud.

As a further consideration, pertaining to this subject, your Committee would state, that the Blind are generally the children of poor parents, because the poor are more exposed than the rich to the accidents occasioning the loss of sight, and because they are more likely to postpone such medical advice, as can be useful only in the early stages of diseases of the eye. Blindness, too, being often hereditary, tends to reduce to poverty, the family upon which it is entailed. The same causes may perhaps be adduced to explain the fact of the greater prevalence of blindness in the country than in the city. In Boston there are but two blind persons of a suitable age for education, while in many towns in the State, containing a population of not more than two or three thousand inhabitants, there are three, four, or five young blind persons.

Were the subject to be regarded, then, only in an economical point of view, it becomes a matter of State policy to educate the blind, since nine out of ten of this class of persons, if left to themselves, would, in some way, burden the community with their support; while every one who is educated and thereby enabled to provide for himself, is a citizen rescued from the almshouse and made a happy and useful member of society.

Considering then, the peculiar wants of this infant Institution; that they are in need of a printing press of a construction totally different from those in common use; that they require some musical instruments to instruct the Blind in an art in which they usually excel; and that they are in want of many other implements and means of acquiring knowledge altogether unlike those used in common schools; and considering further the ability which this Institution seems to possess for the extensive diffusion of usefulness, and comfort and happiness, your Committee recommend an adoption by the Legislature of the accompanying Resolve.

All which is respectfully submitted.

SAMUEL P. LOUD. *Chairman.*

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty Three.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court assembled, That there be paid out of the Treasury of the Commonwealth to the Trustees of New England Asylum for the Blind the sum of six thousand dollars annually, in quarterly payments, the first payment to be made on the first day of April next, and the subsequent payments upon the first day of each successive quarter; and the whole to continue during the pleasure of the Legislature and no longer. Provided, that in consideration of said sum of six thousand dollars, the said New England Asylum shall receive, board, lodge and educate twenty poor persons belonging to the State, to be placed there under the direction of the Governor and Council; and to be dismissed from the Asylum by the same authority; and provided further, that no individual under the age of six years nor over the age of twenty-four years shall be placed in said Asylum by said authority, nor any person who shall be excluded by the standing by-laws of the Asylum.

Be it further resolved by the authority aforesaid, That the Governor, by and with the advice and consent of Council be, and he hereby is requested to draw his warrant upon the Treasurer of the Commonwealth for the benefit of the said Asylum, for the same sums and payable at the same times as are mentioned in the preceding Resolve.

